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ABSTRACT

No one denies that students have many more distractions today than in days gone by. The need for family involvement in a child's reading progress joins a surge in American society for parents to take more responsibility for their children's character and in the condition of their communities. Some hints for parents in establishing family literacy are: (1) read books yourself; (2) read to your children every day; (3) use expression when reading aloud; (4) if working late, have a book at work that you can read to your child over the phone; and (5) plan time for family members to read together. The school can provide support by developing a line of communication from school to home. For example, public schools in Alaska have theme nights involving the whole family in an evening of storytelling, and giving the student the choice of a book to keep. These and other ideas can help foster a love for literature and establish lifelong reading. (Contains 5 references.) (CR)

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Family and reading. Those two words used go together like Martin and Lewis. These days we are in a constant battle with television, video games, working parents and unmotivated students to encourage reading as a necessity for a fulfilled life. No longer is it habitual to grab a book after dinner and disappear into the sofa for a mind adventure. How many kids do you know that prefer a novel over a remote control? How can a reading curriculum be taught both affectively and with enjoyment as an outcome? Are there ways to sway children towards reading and away from those competing brain-numbing activities? The competition is real and permeates all of society, irregardless of culture, economics or zip code. With the benefit of insights from some sagacious education professionals, I will expose some of the hindrances, while exploring many of the remedies towards lifelong reading. In this paper I will review and reflect on literature concerning the promotion of family reading.

During my research for this article I have discovered some basic themes running through the writings dealing with the subject of family and their influence on reading. First, no one denies students have many more distractions today than in days gone by. With competition for the attention of children becoming increasingly sensory, the wholesome thoughtfulness of a good book can be lost in the dizzying assault of technology. The idea of persuading a child to read a book over playing the newest video game, is often times a losing battle. A belief that reading enhances the senses, and much of the "technology" deadens them, is a strong argument for increased exploration into systems that teach value and priorities.

Second, the need for family involvement solely in a child's reading progress, minimizes the urgency for its' involvement in everyday activities. There is a surge in American society for parents to take more responsibility for their children's character, and also in the condition of their communities. What better way to influence what a child values than through reading great

literature. Some of the reading programs I will discuss next are invaluable when creating environments that make reading fun, and family unity essential. These examples along with a supportive family will greatly increase the chance of children becoming committed readers.

And last, there are numerous activities that aid in producing young, motivated readers. The common thread that runs through all of the activities are that they build stronger families and more united communities. The role of the school is that of provider and supporter. The school provides and supports by developing a line of communication from school to home. And through this line of communication provides activities for family reading, and supports these activities with literature and encouragement. Some of the hints for establishing family literacy are as follows:

1. Ask your child to guess what's going to happen in the story.
3. Show your love for books. Recommend books you think other family members might like and have them recommend one they think you might like.
4. Read yourself. Let your family see you reading.
5. Stick interesting reading material you've come across during your day in your pocket to share later with your family.
6. If your child asks to stay up a little longer, say yes! This is golden opportunity for a 15-minute reading session.
7. When ever going on a long trip or going someplace where there could be a long wait, always pack a book.
8. If you work too late, have a book at work that you can read over the phone to your child.
9. Read to your child 20 minutes everyday.
10. Plan time for family members to read together.
11. Have a reading light in children's room so they can read anytime.
12. Read poetry, fiction, non-fiction. Read for information and just for fun.
13. Use expression when reading.
14. Get children hooked on books by beginning a book and allowing them to finish on their own.
15. Have a night of the week be "classic literature night" where you read a great book to the whole family.

Obviously, this is just a start to the many creative ways to initiate literacy through family involvement. Most importantly, all these suggestions have a byproduct.... family unity. Many parents have become too busy with their own lives, and are unaware that public education can't possibly meet all the needs of its' students. Parents must become more aware of the shortcomings

of public education, while developing more of a sense of responsibility for their part in the educational development of their children. In Pardini (1995) she mentions that far too many students suffer from PDD (parental deficit disorder). Kids simply are not getting the kind of support, direction and guidance parents ought to be giving their kids. Part of the blame must be cast upon public schools. They have taken it upon themselves to take up the slack for irresponsible parents. Many parents have begun to look towards schools far too much in regards to their child's discipline and motivation. "Administrators have actually described some parents as 'openly obnoxious and uncooperative' and who show little support for the school." (Pardini p.30)

On the other hand, there are many articles today with viable suggestions for family involvement in the reading process. In Baghban (1995) and Johnston, Curry, Nielsen, and Pace (1995) we are given numerous ideas for initiating reading for the entire family as a part of each day. They emphasize the role family and caregivers play in fostering a love for literature by reading and discussing stories with kids.

Schools and the impact they can have are discussed in both McCrackin (1995) and Steger (1995). Theme nights are taking place at public schools in Alaska. They involve the whole family in an evening of learning together. Families have been known to brave ice, fog and 30-below temperatures, just to attend the action-packed events. These "theme nights" build invaluable connections between home and school, and encourages parental involvement. Steger describes a principal's weekly visit to the home of one of his school's students for an evening of storytelling. The student is selected by a drawing each week, only students names who wish to participate are put into the ballot box. On the night of the event, the principal will bring a bag full of books, giving the student a plethora of choices. Also in the bag are cookies, which seem to add to the wholesome atmosphere of the evening. The entire family gathers round for an old-fashioned

telling of a classic tale. At the end of the event the chosen student may select a book out of the principal's bag for his/her own to keep. Not only has a valuable connection been made between the school and community, but his modeling the importance of reading and the enjoyment one receives is a immeasurable consequence.

In closing, I'm optimistic in my concern for the generation presently learning to read. With the wealth of caring educators, and a increasing number of thoughtful parents preaching the importance of reading, I'm convinced this current trend of minimal literacy is on the way out. In spite of the sensory bombardment kids must endure, what truly endures is great literature. And once the appreciation is evident, reading becomes a function of life, something as rudimentary and compulsory as eating breakfast. A big part of my job as a new teacher will be to instill that love for literature, something I'm looking forward to modeling and promoting to all my future students.

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